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Hawaii News

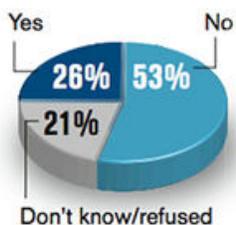
NextEra losing support for plan to purchase HEI

By Kathryn Mykleseth
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QUESTION

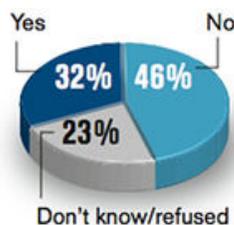
NextEra Energy, a Florida-based company, proposes to buy Hawaiian Electric. Do you think this acquisition would be good for Hawaii?

Jan. 2016



The Hawaii Poll, conducted by Ward Research Inc. Dec. 28-Jan. 9 on cellphones and landlines, included 433 registered voters on Oahu. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 4.7 points.

Jan. 2015



The Hawaii Poll, conducted by Ward Research Inc. Jan. 13-23, 2015, on cellphones and landlines, included 322 registered voters on Oahu. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 5.5 points.

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Opposition to NextEra Energy Inc.'s proposed \$4.3 billion purchase of Hawaiian Electric Industries is growing among Hawaii residents, according to the latest Hawaii Poll.

The poll of 433 residents conducted between Dec. 28-Jan. 9 showed 53 percent don't think NextEra's purchase of HEI would be good for Hawaii. That's up from a year ago when 46 percent of respondents opposed the sale.

Of those surveyed, 26 percent said the sale would be good for the state, down from 32 percent who supported the sale in the January 2015 poll. The undecideds were flat at 21 percent in the recent poll versus 23 percent a year ago.

The survey was conducted by Ward Research Inc. with a margin of error of plus or minus 4.7 percentage points.

Florida-based NextEra announced in December 2014 its plan to buy HEI — the parent company of Hawaiian Electric Co., Hawai'i Electric Light Co. and Maui Electric Co. — and spin off its American Savings Bank subsidiary. The sale must be approved by the state Public Utilities Commission, which has been holding hearings on the matter and is expected to decide later this year.

NextEra has been campaigning for public support, saying the company could accelerate Hawaii's goal of 100 percent renewable electricity by 2045 while lowering electric rates. NextEra promised to save customers \$60 million over four years after the sale closes.

Some residents said they did not support NextEra because it hasn't done enough to encourage rooftop solar at its regulated electric utility in Florida. There are approximately 3,000 Florida Power & Light customers with rooftop solar among the utility's 4.8 million customers. Hawaiian Electric has about 71,000 rooftop solar systems among its 450,000 customers.

"My main concern is that NextEra seems to have a dismal record promoting renewables in Florida and they seem to be painting a picture of themselves as a white knight in that department here," said Kahala resident Richard Reese, 70. "That doesn't seem to jive with their record."

"I don't doubt that HECO needs a financially stronger partner," Reese said. "I'm not sure that NextEra is the one. I want the person that is going to walk the walk, not talk the talk and that is where I have reservations."

Two things may have hurt NextEra's public support in the past year. In July, Gov. David Ige said he was opposed to the sale. Then an email came out during the PUC hearings in December in which Connie Lau, Hawaiian Electric's CEO, quoted another top HEI official as saying Hawaiian Electric is just a "snack" for NextEra on its way to the "buffet" of buying more mainland utilities.

"I think the better thing is for us to keep the money local instead of shoveling money out the door to somebody else," said Valley of the Temples resident Jim Miller, 50. "They have been lobbying all sorts of things. They have commercials on the radio station. It kind of seems like it is a false facade."

The sale has gained support from local unions and business leaders. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1260 praised the sale in October after talks

with NextEra. Since IBEW's announcement, four chambers of commerce and a union coalition announced support for the purchase.

Still, most union members — 54 percent — surveyed in the poll were opposed to the sale with 24 percent in favor.

[Hawaii Poll — NextEra](#)